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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [EAIR](#) [PARM](#) [MARR](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: A/S FRIED MEETING WITH RUSSIAN AMBASSADOR USHAKOV

Classified By: EUR DAS Kramer, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On December 11, Russian Ambassador Yuriy Ushakov met with EUR A/S Daniel Fried for a read-out of meetings of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) and the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) at the foreign ministers level in Brussels. Fried noted that the NRC "could have been much worse." He informed Ushakov that the U.S. would issue a strong statement of regret over Russian suspension of CFE, but would not act in a hostile or threatening way. On missile defense, Fried encouraged Russia to focus on the core of the proposal, rather than on semantics (visits vice liaisons). Fried delivered a strong message on the recent MFA statement criticizing EUR DAS Kramer's comments on Russian elections, noting that the language was "unfortunate and unjust." In Fried's view, the most difficult issue facing U.S.-Russian relations is the enemy image of the U.S. in Russia. Fried passed a dipnote to Ushakov on state flights that related the IRS agrees Russia should not be paying surcharges on fuel, and that if taxes have been charged, Russia is entitled to a refund. On Kosovo, Fried encouraged Russia to play a helpful role, and emphasized that it is a disagreement, not a crisis. Ushakov noted that the Kremlin denied stories that Presidents Lukashenko and Putin would sign a Union State Constitution during Putin's December 13-14 visit to Minsk. END SUMMARY.

Readout of NATO Meetings

¶2. (C) Fried expressed regret that the U.S. and Russia were unable to achieve more on CFE during the NRC, but noted that the NRC meetings "could have been much worse." He commented that although we could not agree on an NRC work plan due to language on CFE, and despite continued disagreement over Kosovo, Russian FM Lavrov was "more restrained" in his remarks than he has been publicly. Ushakov highlighted the high-level contact that took place between Russia and Poland, when Lavrov met with Polish FM Sikorski on the margins of the NRC. Fried replied that tensions between Russia and Poland were unnecessary, and that President Tusk was ready to do business with Russia.

Next Steps on CFE Treaty ...

¶3. (C) Fried informed Ushakov that U.S. reaction to Russian suspension of CFE will include a strong statement of regret, but that the U.S. will not act in a threatening and hostile way. It will be up to Russia to create the conditions to return to the negotiation table. Fried mentioned that there would probably be a NATO statement Wednesday or Thursday that will be critical, but it would not close the door on negotiations. He called the Russian position on CFE difficult to defend because of its inherent weakness - the Russians are calling on Allies to ratify the A/CFE, while simultaneously demanding changes to it. He commended Russian

MFA Disarmament Chief Antonov for his "highly professional" approach in defending the Russian position in the face of Allied unity.

... and on Missile Defense

14. (C) Ushakov inquired if there would be new elements to the U.S. proposal on MD at the December 13 experts meeting in Budapest, and Fried responded that the Russians "already have the U.S. proposal." He objected to the negative public reaction to the U.S. proposal, noting that it was an "interesting negotiating tactic." However, he continued, the Russians were focusing on the wrong issue. The Russians should be focusing on the core of the proposal, which is very ambitious, and realize a joint regional architecture is not something the U.S. is giving the Russians, but something the U.S. and Russia will design together. This idea was made possible by Putin's proposal at Heiligendamm. What the Russians should not be focusing on, he said, are the secondary details, such as the semantics of liaison versus visits. Fried acknowledged that these are good points for debate, but do not answer the essence of the U.S. proposal.

15. (C) Fried underscored the U.S. desire to have another "2 2" Ministerial, but noted that timing would depend on the substance to be discussed. EUR DAS Kramer added that it was a matter of finding the best time, considering the political

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changes taking place in Russia. While Secretaries Rice and Gates were pleased the 2 2 Ministerial in October generated new ideas on both CFE and MD, Fried emphasized that the U.S. would "want to see some new ideas" from the Russians in the next 2 2.

Overheated Russian Rhetoric

16. (C) Fried delivered a strong message on the recent MFA statement which criticized DAS Kramer's interview with the BBC on Russian elections, noting that the language was "unfortunate and unjust." The Duma elections prompted strong reactions from many countries, including Germany, yet the Russian "nervous" reaction was only directed against DAS Kramer. Fried emphasized that he was not formally lodging a protest against the statement, but was surprised that Kramer's comments elicited from the MFA a condemnation that was personal, overblown, and similar to Soviet polemics. Ushakov replied that it "is difficult to weigh" which side is more negative than the other, and that Russia was not pleased by Secretary Rice's comments on Russian democratic institutions. Fried reiterated that the harsh reaction to Kramer's comments was unjustified, as Kramer was speaking with the authorization of the U.S. government.

17. (C) Fried said he was asked during informal meetings with the Carnegie Institute in Moscow about the most difficult issue facing U.S.-Russian relations. He related that among all the challenges we face, from Kosovo to CFE, the most difficult issue is the enemy image of the U.S. in Russia. This image, supported by the Russia media, is so challenging because the U.S. cannot do anything about it. Fried commented that the anti-American rhetoric is appearing more and more reminiscent of the Soviet era. Ushakov interrupted that Congress still supports a Cold War mentality by using Jackson-Vanik restrictions. Fried agreed that Russia should have already graduated from Jackson-Vanik, and noted that he has stated as such before.

Breaking the State Flights Logjam

18. (C) Responding to DFM Kislyak's charges that Russia has paid taxes on aviation fuel for its official flights, Fried

passed Ushakov a diplomatic note relating that the IRS agrees Russia should not be paying surcharges on fuel; if taxes have been charged inadvertently, the Russian government is entitled to a refund. Ushakov replied that this was a positive step on the issue of state flights, and a Russian delegation was ready to travel to Washington for discussions to resolve the impasse over Russian insistence that U.S. official flights pay landing and navigation fees. Fried mentioned that he has discussed the issue of state flights with the Secretary, and they are thinking through all possible options to resolve the impasse.

Avoiding a Kosovo Crisis

19. (C) Fried acknowledged that Kosovo was a very difficult situation, but asserted that it did not have to become a crisis. Fried criticized Speaker Gryzlov's suggestion that the newly-elected Duma should discuss the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, commenting that this would be a dangerous and destabilizing action. DFM Karasin has repeatedly assured Fried that Russia will "behave responsibly," and Fried understands that Gryzlov does not speak for the Russian government, Fried explained that Georgian President Saakashvili is "nervous," and we do not need more "nervousness" in the Caucasus.

110. (C) While the U.S. and Russia obviously disagree on Kosovo, Fried expressed hope that Russia would not inflame tensions by encouraging destabilizing Serbian behavior, such as cutting the electricity to Kosovo, or taking other steps that would cripple the Kosovo economy. The U.S. does not expect Serbia to embrace Kosovo independence, but the question is how it will oppose independence - will it take destabilizing actions or not? Ushakov stated that Serbia is an independent country, and any reactions it has to Kosovo independence cannot be blamed on Russia. Fried stressed that Russia has significant influence over Serbia, and the U.S. is requesting Russian assistance by utilizing that influence. Fried said some Serb leaders are using Kosovo for domestic political purposes and are abusing Russian support.

111. (C) Ushakov raised the possibility of continuing negotiations on Kosovo status, and Fried immediately rejected that option. The U.S. and Europeans agree that Serbia is not interested in reaching a negotiated settlement; rather, it is

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only attempting to buy time. Russian Second Secretary Andrey Temyashov noted that since the upcoming Serbian presidential election is a sensitive issue for the Europeans, perhaps it would make sense to postpone independence. Since Serbian President Kostunica has stated the election would be postponed if there is a threat to Serbian independence, Fried replied, this could be used to indefinitely postpone Kosovo independence. We should first wait to see when the election will be held, then make a judgment call on the timing of independence.

Belarus-Russia "Union State"?

112. (C) While highlighting that no one in the U.S. government is getting "worked up" over Putin's December 13-14 trip, Kramer asked if Ushakov had seen the speculation that Belarus President Lukashenko and Putin would sign a Union State Constitution in Minsk. Ushakov was skeptical about these reports, noting that the Kremlin had already denied them. He called this speculation just one "part of the puzzle" of Putin's plans after he steps down from the presidency. Kramer asked if Putin was going to be Prime Minister, as Dmitriy Medvedev had suggested December 11, noting that Putin did not say yes. Ushakov noted that Putin did not say no, either.

RICE